

MA THESIS

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PHASES

EXPLORATION OF THE BODY AND SOUL OF A DESIGNER

🌸 Oona Rähäntausta

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Author Oona Räyhäntausta		
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Abstract

The focus of this master's thesis is artistic research on the cultivation of a connection to one's own body and its effects on the visual design process. It is with the sensing body that we as designers find inspiration and materials for our work. For this reason, calming the wandering mind by grounding oneself in the body, which resides in the present moment, helps to focus on the task at hand.

The method chosen for connecting with my physicality is bodily exercises conducted through the field of mind-body awareness. The art form chosen is audiovisual storytelling, selected for its versatile possibilities. In this thesis, I shift the view of the mind and body as being separated to a view of the two held in unity.

The inspiration for the subject came from my student exchange to Tokyo in 2019. I was working on a self-initiated audiovisual project, which due to difficulties in my personal life, did not progress as I had hoped. After enrolling in a performance art course, I discovered that the production process of this project, *Phase 1*, began to flow more easily. This thesis continues this in-depth examination of how acknowledging one's bodily existence affects both one's visual design and artistic identity.

The thesis introduction is followed by a section on relevant theory, where crucial terms and concepts are described. In this section I also discuss bodily approaches to design and mind-body awareness. In a further examination of methods and materials, I outline the concept of artistic research and my previous audiovisual works, my process diary of the bodily exercises and two audiovisual outcomes. The first, *What the wind told me*, is a depiction of the personal effects of the bodily exercises, whereas the other, *Phase 2*, is a sequel to *Phase 1*. In the final section, I discuss the overall process and its implications. The primary research findings include changes from language-oriented storytelling to a movement-based one, heightened sensitivities to environmental aesthetic qualities, the understanding of one's situated knowledge and increased empathy between myself and others.

By linking the holistic nature of mind-body awareness to a bodily design approach to artistic research, this thesis reveals that artistic practices are inseparable from life experiences.

Links to referenced projects:

<https://oonarayhantausta.com/phase-1>

<https://oonarayhantausta.com/what-the-wind-told-me>

<https://oonarayhantausta.com/phase-2>

Keywords mind-body awareness, soma design, audiovisual, video, artistic research, empathy, aesthetics

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Tiivistelmä

Tämä maisterin opinnäytetyö tutkii kehoyhteyden muodostamista ja sen vaikutusta visuaaliseen suunnitteluun taiteellisen tutkimuksen keinoin. Visuaalisina suunnittelijoina keräämme inspiraatiomme ja materiaalimme aistivan kehomme kautta. Tämän vuoksi vaeltelevan mielen rauhoittaminen yhteyden luomisella omaan kehoon, joka on aina nykyhetkessä, auttaa keskittymään käsillä olevaan tehtävään.

Kehoyhteyttä vahvistaakseni tein harjoitteita keho-mielitietoisuuden kentältä. Valitsemani taiteellinen ilmaisukeino on audiovisuaalinen tarinankerronta sen monipuolisuuden johdosta. Tässä opinnäytetyössä mieli ja keho nähdään yhtenäisyytenä.

Sain inspiraation opinnäytetyöni aiheeseen vuoden 2019 vaihto-opiskelujaksoltani Tokiosta. Työskentelin itsenäisen audiovisuaalisen projektin parissa, joka henkilökohtaisen elämäni hankaluuksien vuoksi ei edennyt toivomallani tavalla. Aloitettuani performanssitaiteen kurssin, projektini *Phase 1* luomisprosessi helpottui ja eteni vaivattomasti. Tällä opinnäytetyöllä halusin tutkia syvemmin, kuinka oman kehollisuutensa tunnustaminen vaikuttaa sekä visuaaliseen suunnitteluun että taiteelliseen identiteettiin.

Johdantolukua seuraa teoriaosuus, jossa esittelen keskeisimmät termit ja konseptit. Tässä osuudessa syvennyn keholliseen suunnitteluun ja keho-mielitietoisuuteen. Metodi- ja materiaaliluvussa kerron taiteellisesta tutkimuksesta ja aikaisemmista audiovisuaalisista töistäni sekä esittelen prosessipäiväkirjani ajalta, jolloin tein kehollisia harjoitteita ja kaksi audiovisuaalista ulostuloa. Ensimmäinen, *What the wind told me*, on suora kuvaus kehollisten harjoitteiden vaikutuksista, siinä missä toinen, *Phase 2*, on jatko-osa *Phase 1* -teokselle. Opinnäytetyön viimeisessä osassa reflektoin prosessia ja sen oppeja. Keskeisimpiä löydöksiä ovat kieliorientoituneen tarinankerronnan muuttuminen liikkeeseen perustuvaan tarinankerrontaan, herkistyminen elämän esteettisyydelle, oman paikkasidonnan tietämyksen ymmärtäminen ja kasvanut empatia itseäni ja muita kohtaan.

Keho-mielitietoisuuden, kehollisen suunnittelun ja taiteellisen tutkimuksen holistisen luonteen vuoksi tämä opinnäytetyö demonstroii sitä, kuinka taiteellinen työskentely on erottamaton henkilön elämäkokemuksista.

Linkit projekteihin:

<https://oonarayhantausta.com/phase-1>

<https://oonarayhantausta.com/what-the-wind-told-me>

<https://oonarayhantausta.com/phase-2>

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1 INTRODUCTION

In our age of massive industrial production, surreal consumption, euphoric communication and fictitious digital environments, we continue to live in our bodies in the same way that we inhabit our houses, because we have sadly forgotten that we do not live in our bodies but are ourselves embodied constitutions. (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 13)

1 Introduction

This thesis is an artistic research about how getting to know one's own body affects the visual design process and one's artistic identity. It is a therapeutic exploration that aims to view the designer as a unity of the mind and body. In this thesis, I am shifting the focus from the Western view of the mind and body being separated to a view in which this duality is no longer agreed to. Furthermore, I am considering one's artistic practice inseparable from their life experience and identity.

The mind wanders both to the future and the past. This wandering makes it hard to focus on the present moment and tasks at hand. It also blurs the senses with which visual artists gather ideas and material to their work – as Juhani Pallasmaa states, "we are connected with the world through our senses" (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 13). Our bodies are always in the present moment, therefore building a strong bodily connection within oneself is a highly grounding practice. I am hoping that this thesis' self-exploration with its audiovisual results will provide reassurance and help for anyone who is feeling disconnected and overwhelmed in their bodies, unable to find focus in their artistic practice. One of the most important effects this exploration provides is empathy towards oneself, which in turn radiates towards others as well.

Inspiration for this thesis' subject came from my exchange period at Tokyo's Musashino Art University (MUA) in 2019. During my master's studies, I had grown fond of audiovisual ways of expressing myself for its possibilities. Before starting my studies in visual communication, my life revolved around music. With moving image, I found a channel to combine these two art forms, and wanted to delve deeper into the subject. Being an enthusiast of Japanese culture, I was thrilled to learn that MUA had a track for moving image which I could apply for. Prior to leaving, I had decided to make a self-initiated film during my stay. However, all the difficulties of living far away from home and growing pains of tapping into new areas of life reached a point where I was not able to properly focus on my film anymore. Luckily, I had registered on a performance art course that started in the middle of my stay. The bodily way of expressing myself visually had a great effect on my artistic identity and how I approached my film, *Phase 1*, making the creation process flow effortlessly. With this thesis, I wanted to explore further the connection between acknowledging my body and my visual communication. It is an important subject to me also because I have existed mostly in my head throughout my life, causing feelings of detachment. I wanted to research a subject that would be healing to me as well as hopefully providing some insight to other visual artists in a similar situation.

In this thesis, the bodily exploration method is from the field of mind-body awareness. This combined with the physical environment that is Lapland, where I was lucky enough to carry out these exercises, made the research take a spiritual turn.

In chapter 2, I will go through crucial terms, have a view on bodily approach to design and mind-body awareness. In chapter 3, I will first introduce artistic research as a methodology, and then go through my previous audiovisual works in order to provide a trajectory of my development as a designer. This is followed by my process diary from the time I did bodily exercises for a period of 32 days, after which I present two audiovisual works that came into being during this thesis. The first one, *What the wind told me* is a direct depiction of the experiences from the bodily exercises, whereas the second one, *Phase 2* is a continuation to the story of *Phase 1*. In chapter 4, I reflect on the process and discuss the learnings, which include a shift from language-oriented visual expression to a bodily, movement-based one.

I view this thesis as a first, organized step towards a lifelong exploration of the subject of being a creator in human form. I am beyond excited to see where this path takes me, especially whether it can be of help for others as well.





2 THEORY

In this chapter, I aim to discuss the key readings, as well as the essential concepts, that have provided theoretical support for the research scope. This chapter also introduces the concept of mind-body awareness.

2.1 Soma, aesthetics and embodiment

To begin with, it is quite important for me to establish that the dualistic conception that separates the mind from the body is deeply rooted in Western philosophy. Changing this perspective is a slow process, and requires profound, ontological observation of human existence. (Shapiro, 1999) However, as the readings will hopefully convince, this conception is withdrawing and giving space for a more holistic understanding of how we as human beings think, sense and feel.

From this point, to further support the notion of the mind and body being in unity instead of being separate entities, I will introduce relevant terms to the research. First, the definition of the term soma: it is the self that unifies our physical existence that has an effect on our mental being, and vice versa (Shusterman, 2008). This means that without a body that exists in the tangible world, that is sensing, no emotions or mental experiences can occur. Likewise, without a mind that is perceiving and feeling, the bodily existence remains vacuous. As the neurologist Frank R. Wilson says, “the brain does not live inside the head” (Wilson, 1998, p. 307).

Another relevant term is aesthetics. The term aesthetic is commonly understood to refer to beauty, but the original meaning is something that is perceptible (Höök, 2018, p. 32; Vilkkä, 2006, para. 1). It is the capability to cherish and value our experiences. From these experiences, when paying attention to them, we can draw tremendous amounts of colourful information and depth. It is essentially about training senses, and a skill that can be developed. (Shusterman, 2008)

Lastly, the term embodiment is used to describe the subjective ways we experience the world around us through our somas (Höök, 2018, p. xix). The theory of embodied mind can be summarised by four terms that start with the letter E:

1. as previously discussed, the mind cannot exist without a body, thus making it Embodied;
2. embodiment is always situated, meaning that our perception of the world is Embedded;
3. parallel to the first point, our mental being is Enacted through the tangible body; and
4. the usage of additional means, such as tools, Extends our mind.

(Damasio, 1999; Johnson, 2007, as cited in Gulliksen, Groth, Mäkelä, & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2016, para. 2)

2.2 Somaesthetics and soma design

Somaesthetics is a concept created by Richard Shusterman, which combines the terms *soma* and *aesthetics* (Höök, 2018, p. xxv). This combination highlights how in order to perceive, there must be the one who perceives (Höök, 2018, s. 32). As previously discussed, our perception of the world is embedded, thus making our understanding characteristically situated. Shusterman (2013) describes the body as “our indispensable tool of tools” (para. 1). Referring back to the aesthetic skill that can be developed, it is necessary to emphasize the significance of the body as it is our physical representation and imperative channel for all of our experiences (Shusterman, 2013). The undisguised aim of somaesthetics is to improve oneself and, through that, make one’s life better (Höök, 2018, p. 33).

Soma design, on the other hand, is a concept created by Kristina Höök, which unites the body with design practice (Höök, 2018, p. xvi). Her book *Designing with the Body: Somaesthetic Interaction Design* (Höök, 2018), albeit coming from the interaction design point of view, provides soma design theory and methods that can be applied for other design practices as well. For the scope of this thesis, I have excluded those theories and methods that do not directly apply for visual design. However, given the holistic nature of soma design, many of the aspects make sense when working on visual communication design, as upcoming sections of this research aim to demonstrate.

Soma design emphasizes shifting the focus from language-oriented design thinking and practice to more of a bodily, felt and movement-based one. Before we can talk, we communicate through movement, and from this movement, language arises. (Höök, 2018, p. 34) In other words, movement-based communication is quite intuitive to the human nature.

Höök (2018) lists four key elements that make good soma design. These are “1) lived experience, 2) the slowing down of design, 3) testing and retesting against the desired aesthetic, and 4) sociodigital materials” (Höök, 2018, p. 18). To further elaborate on these elements, I will reflect each one to my artistic practice in the following chapter.

To be able to design somaesthetically, it is required to be able to feel and articulate somatic experiences (Höök, 2018, p. 169). This is why it is quite crucial for soma design to be slow-paced: to be able to recognize different sensations and to be able to put the sensations into words requires knowing oneself, which in turn requires time and dedication. Höök (2018) also states that it is often necessary to train oneself for years in order to be proficient in soma design (Höök, 2018, p. 154).

2.3 The body as a tool

Referring back to Shusterman's (2013) quote about the body as a tool, it is perhaps the most essential viewpoint for this thesis. As an audiovisual designer, I have always had an external tool to materialize my ideas, whether it be pen and paper or the computer. However, after engaging in performance art I came to realize, that it is my body that is the first and foremost tool that brings my ideas to life.

The architect Juhani Pallasmaa's book *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Pallasmaa, 2009) talks about the body, more specifically the hand, taking a role in thinking. The hand materializes an idea, which is not something that emerges from nothingness: it is rather a mosaic of things that the senses have once experienced (Pallasmaa, 2009, pp. 16-17). A design task is not merely a logical problem to be solved, but an analysis that combines all the things the designer has learned in life, both professionally and generally speaking (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 109). Existential knowledge, which contains all the experiences one has lived through, with emotions and reactions to the world, is present in an artists' work and shapes their ethical judgment (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 119). This is another way of acknowledging our somatic existence.

As an audiovisual designer, my primary external tools are a camcorder, a recorder, a tablet and a midi keyboard for composing audio, and a computer for editing and compiling my materials. Audiovisual art enables a multitude of ways to express oneself. That being said, the external tool the designer uses becomes an extension of the body, and in that way determinates the designer's actions (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 50). This means that the designer needs to collaborate with their mediums and materials (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 55). In my case, I have to acknowledge both the possibilities and restrictions of my external tools. A lot can be recorded, but a certain tangibility will always be missing from digital work.

Pallasmaa (2009) writes about the importance of physical modelling even in our digital age, for it is the three-dimensionality that shares common ground with our bodies (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 57). He also talks about the more embodied nature of sketching instead of merely taking photographs (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 90). "Each sketch and drawing contains a part of the maker and his/her mental world" (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 91), but I would like to argue that so does other means of recording surrounding reality as well. It is all about what one decides to highlight.

I have found that performance-based video work and manufacturing the audio from field recordings and human sounds make the end result more tangible, since these methods have their roots deeply in the physical world. Performance for me is always more about sketching than acting, more about observing what my body will do in the moment. In that way, I am sketching while carrying out my practice, even if it does not happen on paper. This is elaborated further in chapter 3.

2.4 Empathy and emotions

According to the Cambridge dictionary, empathy is defined as being able to share the feelings and experiences of another "by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation"¹. It is widely acknowledged, that empathy has both affective and cognitive elements to it (Davis, 1983, p. 113). Affective empathy is essentially about emotional reactivity to the mental state of another, whereas cognitive empathy is more about imagining and perspective-taking (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017, S4358). In design, practices that use methods for cultivating an empathic end product include for instance user-centered design and participatory design. Often the methods are based on role-playing, assuming the role of the user, thus making these approaches closely related to cognitive empathy. (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017, S4359)

In their article, Devecchi and Guerrini (2017) introduce philosophers Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, whose theories about empathy acknowledges a different kind of view. Instead of having a nature of merging with another as it is with affective and cognitive empathy, Husserl and Stein suggested that empathy has to do with recognizing intersubjectivity as well as the externality of another's experiences. (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017, S4358) In design, this approach to empathy could open a dialogue between the designer and the user, in a reflective manner (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017, S4359). To conclude, it would shift the practice "from design with empathy to design for empathic experiences" (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017, S4362).

Out of all the senses we have, visual sense is the most dominant one (Höök, 2018, p. 99). Compared to several other visually perceiving organisms, the eyes of a human are a complex system with numerous parts that gather information (Smart Vision Labs, 2017, para. 3). Our emotions take place in specific parts of the brain: amygdala and hippocampus. It has been shown in neuroscience, that visual stimuli go to these parts of the brain, as well as to the frontal lobe, which is responsible for our decision making. (Ledoux, 2015, as cited in Höök, 2018, p. 40) Emotions also help us evaluate on which way to act (Höök, 2018, p. 39). The recognition of the connection between visual stimuli and emotions is significant, especially in the context of visual communication design, as it is first and foremost a communication practice that focuses on vision.

2.5 Brainstorming, bodystorming and slowstorming

Brainstorming is a common group ideation method that typically emphasizes the quantity of ideas instead of the quality (McConnell, 2019, para. 5). It is a method that relies on imagination, which leaves the connection between the user and the product quite superficial (Koskinen, Mattelmäki & Battarbee, 2003, p. 46). Bodystorming, on the other hand, requires the designers to ideate in the actual environment the design will be used in, in a role-playing manner (Wilson, 2011, para. 1). This method is more empathetic in nature, as it calls for the designer to step in the situation the prospective user would be in.

In her book *Designing with the Body: Somaesthetic Interaction Design* (Höök, 2018), Höök introduces a third way of brainstorming, calling it slowstorming. Slowstorming is a soma ideation method (Höök, 2018, p. 158), that is beneficial for this research. To slowstorm, one needs to engage in a somatic practice before ideating. This results in a more honest, softer and reflective approach that aims to deeply understand the design task at hand. (Höök, 2018, p. 158) The somatic practice Höök (2018) herself was engaging in, was Feldenkrais, but any practice that amplifies grounding oneself in the present moment is sufficient (Höök, 2018, p. 92). In the following section I will introduce the practice I engaged in for the sake of this research.

2.6 Thea Rytz: Centered and Connected: A Therapeutic Approach to Mind-Body Awareness (2009)

As discussed earlier, to be able to slowstorm, one is required to engage in a somatic practice. For this reason, I familiarized myself with Thea Rytz's book *Centered and Connected: A Therapeutic Approach to Mind-Body Awareness* (2009). Rytz comes from the field of Mind-Body Awareness Therapy, and in addition to working as a therapist, she has been teaching somatic practices (Rytz, 2009, p. 30). This book contains somatic exercises, some of which will be presented indirectly in the next chapter through my process diary.

Mind-Body Awareness is aiming for self-acceptance. Self-acceptance is an ongoing process that requires dedication and time. It is a decision we can make every day, however, that is not to say that it is an easy one. (Rytz, 2009, p. 17) Here we can draw a connection to Höök (2018), claiming that to be able to design somaesthetically, it is necessary to dedicate time and effort to know oneself. Mind-Body Awareness is also recognizing the Western dualism that is separating the body from the mind (Rytz, 2009, p. 20). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher, states that our bodily perception of the physical reality is the source of our understanding of life (Merleau-Ponty, 2003). It is quite close to what the term *soma* is articulating, as we found previously. By engaging in Mind-Body Awareness, we can recognize both our restrictions and capabilities (Rytz, 2009, p. 25).

Mind-Body Awareness calls for acknowledging one's proprioceptive sense (Rytz, 2009, p. 28). Proprioception is accountable for the body's sense of movement and position. It consists of sensory receptors that are located in tendons, joints and muscles. (Walker, 2014, para. 7)

Rytz (2009) states that fundamentally, Mind-Body Awareness sensitizes one "to the diversity of everyday experience" (Rytz, 2009, p. 39). This includes cultivating the ability to observe one's thoughts, feelings and sensations instead of reacting to them immediately. This is what oscillating awareness is about – giving equal attention to the three different extents of perception. (Rytz, 2009, p. 40) Mind-Body Awareness helps to acknowledge the interaction between one's surroundings and soma, grounding the mind through bodily sensations (Rytz, 2009, p. 42).

To conclude, Mind-Body Awareness is a simple, but demanding practice. It's a process of a lifetime, that aims to self-development. (Rytz, 2009, p. 46)





3 METHOD AND MATERIALS

I start this chapter with introducing the method used for this research, after which I will present my previous audiovisual works in order to create a line of development. This is followed by my process diary from when I performed somatic exercises by Rytz (2009) daily as a means to slowstorm for the audiovisual outcomes of this thesis. The audiovisual outcomes in question are introduced after the process diary.

3.1 Artistic research

In this thesis, the methodology is artistic research. This methodology is essentially about the artist communicating through art works, through contemplating their interpretations of the research subject and through their own artistic practice. (Hannula, 2009, p. 4) Due to the qualitative and experimental nature of this kind of research, it is crucial to acknowledge that one is always situated in a certain kind of environment. Thus, the knowledge one has is location based and ties together one's past, present and possible futures. It calls for transparency and self-criticism. (Hannula, 2009, p. 4) Hannula states, that artistic research is "an ongoing process of sharing in the production of ways of reflecting on our plural ways of being-in-the-world" (Hannula, 2009, p. 6).

One main characteristic of artistic research is its slow pace. It is a process that often lasts a lifetime. (Hannula, 2009, p. 8) This is similar to the nature of soma design (see chapter 2.2) and Mind-Body Awareness (see chapter 2.6). The other main characteristic is that it is always supposed to be contextual (Hannula, 2009, p. 9). In this thesis's case, I am observing the subject from a visual designer's point of view. Furthermore, artistic research aims to be objective by being as subjective as possible. This means that no opinions or views are presented as universal but situated and highly personal. (Hannula, 2009, p. 17) This approach is parallel with Husserl and Stein's (see chapter 2.4) statement about empathy and its essence of enabling understanding that each person experiences life from a situated point of view.

Artistic research entwines three tasks. Firstly, the development of the artist and their practice. Secondly, establishing a vocabulary for describing their art in order to contribute to the academic world in form of a thesis. Thirdly, this contribution extending outside of the academia, communicating with the audience. (Hannula, Suoranta, Vadén, 2014, p. 167)

Artistic research relies largely on senses, our physical reality and existentiality, thus making it intersubjective given its experiential nature. Both the tools used and the end result of this kind of research can be perceived through our senses. As previously discussed, the human experience the world is sensory, and it is what connects us all regardless of time and space. (Varto, 2018, p. 17) The methods used in artistic research are as varied as the practice itself (Varto, 2018, p. 21).

The limitation of artistic research is that it is highly subjective, thus making it situated knowledge. Varto (2018) writes about our singular human experiences, and how in artistic research the emerging insights are compelling the closer they are to the artists' practice. In addition to the subjective insights, drawing connections to existing theories creates a combination of familiarity and unfamiliarity. This combination is the key to understand, that while some things can be articulated with common terms and theories, our singularity keeps our questions and answers situated. (Varto, 2018, p. 51)

In this thesis, my artistic research is focusing on the process rather than the product itself.

3.2.1 Kansai beauty (2017)

In order to understand the development of my visual communication through audiovisual outputs, I will start my analysis from the earlier works I have done prior to this thesis. I will not include animations I have made, to keep the development more evident and clearer. The earliest, fully realised audiovisual work I did was *Kansai beauty* (2017). It was a school project I produced in Kyoto Institute of Technology, where I had my bachelor’s exchange. The task was to simply film anything, so I chose a subject that was, and still is, an endless inspiration for me – nature. I filmed gardens and fauna around Kyoto and Nara, hence the name. The film itself consists of sedate and close to unedited shots accompanied with music I composed in GarageBand™ from Apple Inc., which is the first and foremost program to me for composing audio. It was the first time I used live film material and my own music that was not assembled purely from ready-made loops.



Fig. 1 Stills from *Kansai beauty*



Fig. 2 Stills from *Kansai beauty*

3.2.2 Paradox of fear (2019)

The next audiovisual project I made was *Paradox of fear* (2019)². It was made for a course during my first year of master’s studies, where the task was to produce a self-initiated art project. It is a film about fears, more specifically the interesting aspect of them: how, on a subjective level, one’s fears can be paralyzing, but on the grand scheme of things they do not really matter. I collected the fears via an online survey (see fig. 3), where people could submit them anonymously. The film material continues with the nature theme, and just like with *Kansai beauty*, I took walks with my camcorder, filming whatever I found interesting, beautiful or odd. Upon compiling the filmed material, I noticed that I had been filming mainly birds and water. This is where I found intuition plays a big part in creative thinking: birds and water, for me, represent the transient nature of life. It constitutes a fitting contrast to the fears presented. This was also the first project I did with Adobe After Effects™, fully immersing myself to the video editing world. The audio was a bit more curated, as I wanted the rhythm to fit the video.

Hey you who are afraid...

...your help is needed!

I'm starting a self-initiated video project about fears and the paradox about them: how they can be paralyzing yet so meaningless in the bigger picture.

You can contribute by telling me anonymously about your fears. There are no particular limitations quality or quantity wise, but in the endgame my goal is to make a film people can relate to.

Some of these fears I collect will end up in the film, most likely in a text format. Since my project is in its very first steps the final form is still to be defined.

So, what are you afraid of and why?

Tell me

Oma vastauksesi

Lähetä

Fig. 3 Questionnaire form

2 See <https://oonarayhantausta.com/paradox-of-fear>

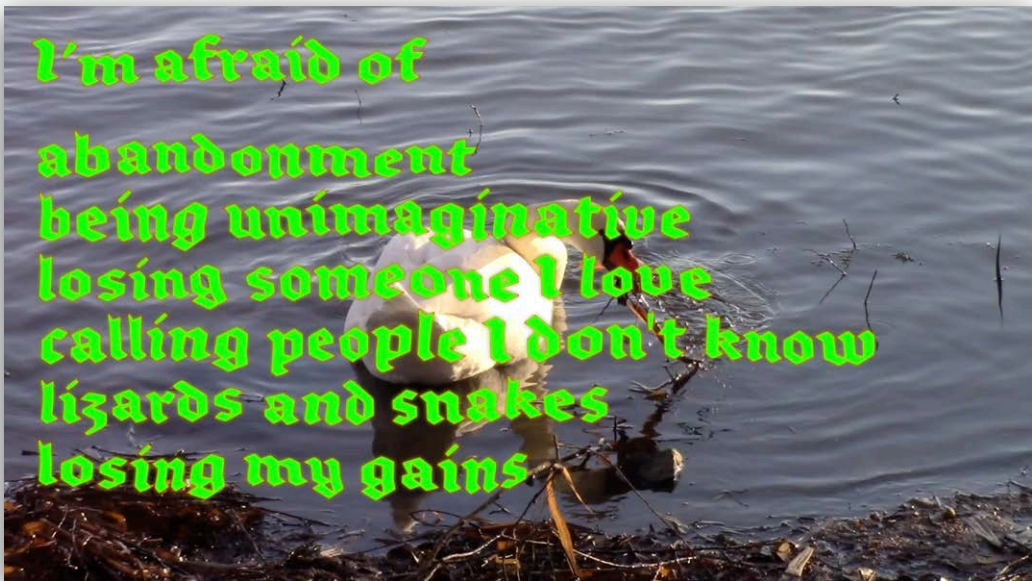


Fig. 4 Stills from *Paradox of fear*

3.2.3 Phase 1 (2019)

After noticing how naturally I was able to articulate myself through audiovisual work, I decided to apply for an exchange in a school where I could study film. As an enthusiast of Japanese culture, I was happy to learn that Tokyo's Musashino Art University had a track "Imaging arts and sciences" which I was able to apply for. Before leaving, I set a goal to film another self-initiated audiovisual project during my stay. This time, while still filming nature, I had the courage to start filming people and inanimate surroundings, such as the city, as well. I say courage, because somehow, I had developed this artistic profile for myself that I only film nature, and it is the only source of inspiration for my live video material. During my exchange, I went through a very difficult period in my personal life, and I think that is what inspired me to perform in the video. I came up with the idea of a Noh-mask wearing, androgynous and anonymous person who actualized my feelings of isolation and being stuck, ultimately portraying my limited being. The editing of *Phase 1*³ was, at first, a very frustrating process, and I even thought about quitting at some point.



Fig. 5 Stills from *Phase 1*

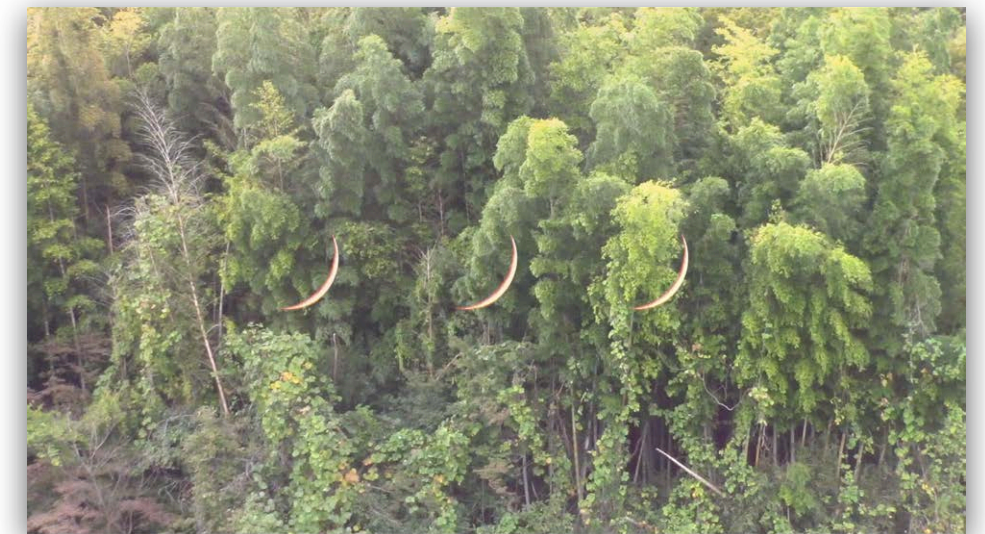


Fig. 6 Stills from *Phase 1*

In the beginning of my exchange period, when choosing what courses to take, I noticed a performance art course that evoked mixed feelings. I had been performing a lot in my life in the field of music and a bit of theatre and ballet, but it had been a long while. On the other hand, I felt like this was exactly what I needed. The course started approximately in the middle of my stay and, thus, my self-initiated video project, as well. This is when the editing process started to flow more naturally. Upon learning to use my body as a means of creative expression, it shifted my focus from trying to tell a story as apprehensible as possible to being more trusting of the intuitive messages emerging. It is quite a similar shift to Höök's (2018) notion of soma design emphasizing bodily and movement-based design practice over language-oriented one. Compared to *Paradox of fear*, in which most of the focus was on the texts presented, *Phase 1* took a different turn in which I found bodily expression as a simple but effective way to visualize the difficult feelings. The audio consists of field recordings, and to modify the soundscape, I learned how to use Adobe Audition™.

From the previously introduced works, *Phase 1* was the one that led me to explore my somatic existence and its connection to my visual design. In the next section, I will present parts of my process diary from summer of 2020, when I performed exercises from Rytz's *Centered and Connected: A Therapeutic Approach to Mind-Body Awareness* (2009). This was to immerse myself in getting to know my body and senses, in order to both slowstorm and take a closer look on how it affects my visual thinking. It is worth mentioning that during the first exercises, I was located in Lapland, enhancing the transforming and connected magic I felt.

The diary entries are formed so that the thoughts in cursive are directly linked to the exercise in question, whereas everything else is about what emerged due to the process.

07.07.2020

So today I start by reading the introduction to Rytz's book and eyeing the exercises. The intro is largely about the split between mind and body, which I've learned to be quite tremendous in my case. I often find it hard to cope with the complexity of the body, with all the detailed systems and functions which I seem to have no control over. I read the first exercise, which was basically only about standing still, and felt a bit sick – it hit me how much I really have to focus on my bodily sensations during this thesis. This is something I've largely avoided, and, needless to say, something I desperately need to tap into.

This book has four somatic exercises in each of the 32 different categories, and I'll be trying out one exercise per category, per day. So, this journey will take 32 days. First, gravity.

◦

First, I felt very uncomfortable. Sweating. Extremely heavy feeling, rather than the earth (floor) was carrying me, I felt that my feet were carrying the whole earth. Hard to stand still, I keep sucking my teeth. After starting to take steps I was very aware of each one of them. Moving was easier than standing still. Laying down was the easiest. I could feel my heartbeat and there was one word in my mind – death. I felt really small. I noticed that my cabin window has spider web all over it.

08.07.2020

Last night I didn't sleep well. I was stuck in thought loops for hours, mosquitos were eating me alive and when I finally got some sleep I had an unpleasant dream. I can't help but wonder if the exercise yesterday brought me more to this reality so to speak, and now I had to deal with stuff I wasn't this aware of. Today, the subject is breathing.

◦

When I held my hands on my stomach and ribs I could hear and feel the bones in my shoulders crack and move, which was really unpleasant. However, especially when breathing during hands on ribs, I felt empathy towards myself – I, too, am a living organism that is trying their best. Holding hands on chest didn't feel much of anything, and a mosquito was bugging me.

09.07.2020

The things I filmed yesterday involved gentle touching. It is no surprise that when you have empathy and tenderness towards yourself, you have it towards others too. I just didn't expect it to occur after one simple exercise. Today we have yawning.

◦

Surprisingly, paying close attention to my jaw bones wasn't hard for me – I actually didn't find it hard to stay present. On the contrary, it was interesting to feel the mechanism. Maybe I felt something that could be described as awe. Rytz was right, pressing the joints made me yawn. My neck is very stiff, probably because my head is so heavy (with thoughts). After the exercise, I feel touched. Shoulders feel stiff.

◦

To be honest though, today I feel less connected. I wonder if that affects me being okay doing this exercise. Still, there's the tenderness which I can kind of feel growing. Comparing the first two exercises which were more comprehensive with their topics, this was less appealing to me. I'm that "bigger picture" kind of person, so for that reason, too, it's interesting having to focus on certain details about my body.

10.07.2020

The vague fragments of ideas I have for "Phase 2" involve myself not only as a body, but as a person, too. So, there's a development: first, I didn't involve myself in my films (at least as a physical entity), then it was me in a mask, and now I'm excited to present myself as I am. Today, arms.

◦

The space my arms provide feels so big, and yet I feel that my personal space is often violated. It's because I don't know how to protect it – I don't speak up because of my fear of conflict and distrust that people will understand me. When I let people in when I don't want them there, my arms (and everything else, too) get stiff. And it goes both ways – because I don't know how to express my needs, I also don't get the affection I need. I almost put quotes on the need. Goes to show how big of a problem this is.



I sometimes say no
even if I want to say yes.

Fairness is an illusion -
the pike did nothing to the bear
and still got eaten.

12.07.2020

Heart. I love this topic. I've been paying close attention to it for a long time, mostly related to anxiety but that has made me aware of the other side of the coin, also – extreme joy and how it feels in my heart area. One of the exercises suggests thinking about how joy feels, and I can tell: it feels like love radiates from my green heart to not only everywhere in my body, but out of my pores to everywhere around me. It makes me feel warm and fuzzy and I close my eyes as I would be dreaming. I lose sleep but it doesn't matter. I could go on and on.

o

This was comfortable. I thought about my ex who wanted to learn my basic heartbeat so that he'd always know how I feel. "Heartbeat doesn't lie." The space between my hands (= my body) felt big. Again, I felt empathy. This body, and especially heart, can do so much and also endure so much. I felt safe. Arms got tired. My heartbeat is pretty fast. A living thing. <3

Joy is love.

13.07.2020

I had a really good day yesterday. I told my old friend things that I've been thinking lately about him (not romantic, just very loving). We should tell each other more nice things if we are thinking about them already. Slept pretty well too. And filmed a lot, pretty mystic stuff and I don't know whether any of it will be in the final film, but the filming part was nice – I was dancing in the woods and meadows barefoot and got bit so many times by different kind of bugs. Face! I'm going to do the mirror exercise, but "Open and Curious" is next step for me, too. I'm already the person who admires physical sensations and I often stop to listen weird sounds (and I love ASMR) or stare at different bodies of water, but I'm afraid of staring at people.

o

Surprised as I knew no opinionated remarks should be made, I didn't expect that I'd have to keep myself from complimenting my facial features. I felt confident. It reminded me of describing pieces of nature, like rocks or trees or moss. Many of these exercises seem to connect me to nature – especially reminding that I'm a part of it, too. This exercise birthed new emotions in me. I don't think I've ever tried to look at myself in such a neutral manner. On bad days, the lens is negative, on good days, I (try to) think as positive as I can. But that, too, can be a bad thing because the other side of that coin exists. Being as objective as I can, there's just that, no surprises or other angles hiding behind the corner.

URGE TO WRITE!



This seems to be a recurring theme
during these exercises:
I feel bigger.

I've had trouble talking about myself to
the point where I've withdrawn myself
from things that, in fact, are mine.



I teared up a little, because I felt safe.

It's really hard to keep my inner peace if
I'm in any interaction with other people.
I don't think anything else disturbs it.

Divine depth of emotions.



16.07.2020

The weather was nice yesterday, until the evening. It was also then when I did my practice and got frustrated. We went fishing and the wind started to blow harder than any other day while we've been here (Lapland, at our cottage). I started laughing in awe and truly felt more connected than ever. And then a rainbow appeared. I don't really believe in coincidences. Taking time. "Step Back Before You Act" is an exercise that was used yesterday, and it's something that is very beneficial for a highly emotional and a bit dramatic person like me.

◦

Taking time is the first and foremost thing I've been focusing on for a while now. After a pretty much non-stop soul-wrenching year it has been much needed. Usually, even in nature, I get stuck on thought loops, but now and here it's been different. I think all the time while roaming around the woods, but the thoughts flow through. It's more emotion based, and all of them feel natural – even the less pleasant ones. I want to touch everything.

◦

Dragonfly and talking with the wind after asking for signs of confirmation.



I could feel my physical limits. It was a pretty new feeling for me, I usually can't tell where my body "ends".

It felt good.



Is everything natural in the end, though?

How can anything that is from the nature and of this earth be unnatural?



19.07.2020

We were driving yesterday for 12 hours, so I had a lot of time to think. I got a good gut feeling about sensuality, or sensitivity being the subject of “Phase 2”. I feel softer every day. By the time we arrived at our destination, I had couple of drinks and only after that remembered that I was to do my exercise. It was actually interesting how much my writing changed. My thinking is like that, but when I have to put it in actual words something always gets lost in translation. Seems like a lot. Next, mouth.

◦

List of activities that I enjoy (not connected to food):

- watching good movies & tv shows
- listening to good music
- especially when it makes me daydream
(in the evening before falling asleep, on long car rides, when I’m taking a walk or going somewhere)
- cuddling etc.
- playing relaxed video games
- learning about spiritual phenomenon
- reading relatable or enlightening stuff
- doing tarot-readings
- getting clean
- laying around with friends
- deep talks
- observing nature
- being in nature
- swinging and other playground activities
- creating art of many forms
- sitting in moving vehicles

22.07.2020

After this exercise I’m halfway through. The last ones have been more connected to thinking, so I’m looking forward to using my body again. Yesterday I returned back to the city and feel a bit disoriented. I have to get used to this pace again. Organs.

◦

I felt like a sandbag. My body is so heavy! Turning myself to lay on every side felt like making sure my insides touch everywhere. Like an inner frosting. Shaking made my blood flow, almost felt like it was boiling a bit. It felt good to move in this way, the city made me feel floaty again and a reminder of having a body was needed. It was tiring, though. My breath made a fragmentary sound.

24.07.2020

Legs. I’m noticing a difference in my ability to read these exercises now that two weeks have passed. Earlier it made me cringe because the descriptions of body parts and functions were so detailed, but now I have no problem with it. I guess I thought avoiding the fact that the human body is so complex would made it easier to have one. But it turns out the more you pay attention, that’s when the magic happens. Also had to do yesterday’s exercise again because it was so fun.

◦

Letting my feet slide all around the floor while being grounded to the chair gave me the same sensation that occurs when I almost trip over. It’s a tingly feeling in my soles and up to my knees. It feels actually pretty nice now that I’m “safely” experiencing it. Why are my hands so sweaty though? After the exercise I can feel the motion of breath in my head.



At first, I was cringing and screaming, then I was like “huh, it ain’t that bad”, then back to cringe, then I got the good ol’ flush of empathy, then I started laughing at this emotional rollercoaster I was experiencing.

26.07.2020

I was out dancing last night. I noticed that whenever I got a little too floaty on the dance floor, I directed my focus on my feet and that helped me to ground myself. Today we have pain. Good subject for the day!

o

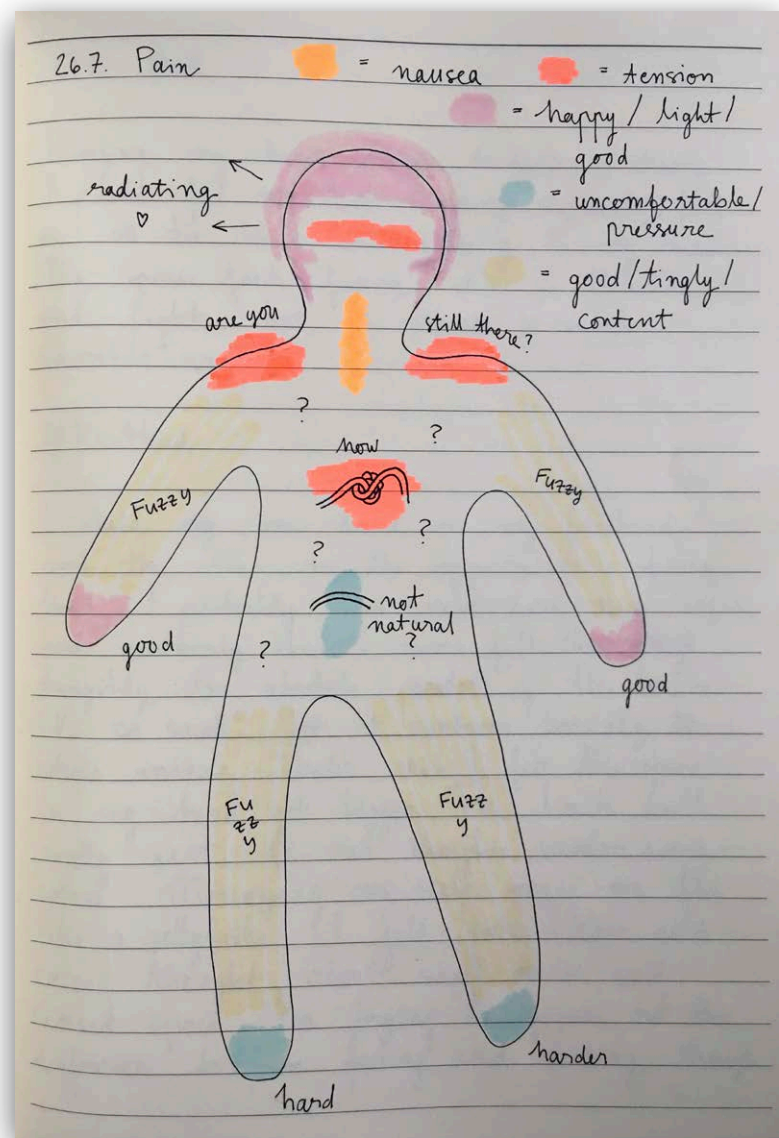


Fig. 7 A page from my process diary

28.07.2020

I've been a bit disoriented. It was much easier follow this routine in Lapland – I feel much less connected in the city. I've started to pay more attention to eating, though, and how it's another way to fill the humane void. We have so many ways to distract ourselves. Next, head.

o

I held one hand on my forehead, and the other on the opposite side of my head. I probably had never done this before, and certainly had I never felt this tangibly the absolute paradox of the brain. It's so small! Yet it contains basically the whole universe. That's when I felt the space in my head get bigger. The limits don't really exist, as our thoughts wander everywhere. Massaging my scalp made me feel like a jellyfish. I felt pure, clean and calm, thought about snail mucus and sensed space. I'm trying to figure out the difference between feeling and sensing, though.

29.07.2020

I feel sorry for my body – I haven't been able to take as good care of it as I did in Lapland. All of the "Change" exercises are so good, it's hard to pick one.

o

The most profound way I remember things is through music. I'm always listening to some, and it tends to bind situations, people and feelings to it. Sometimes it's impossible for me to listen to certain music due to the intense emotions it brings. Yearning is the hardest one. But then again, I can dwell in positive experiences easily, too. I take pictures to remember things. I don't really care if it's a good picture or a perfect composure. Usually it's not even a "good" moment. But otherwise, I might forget. I have many things in my apartment that bring back memories. Almost all of them, to be honest. If they don't remind of an actual place (like Thailand, Scotland or Japan), they take me back to a certain mindset. I don't really know how much stability and change I want, but much more stability than I actually thought. I've come to like routine.

30.07.2020

Yesterday I experienced a situation that normally would've made me anxious and feel sorry for myself, but instead I shrugged it off. What happens, happens, I thought, and nothing is coincidental. It was a good timing with the change exercise day – this situation will transform me for the better. Today we have bones and joints.

-

I think this exercise brought back my problem with feet – moving my ankles felt uncomfortable. I don't think I dare to move them as much as I could. Arms are flowy. I feel completely moved, blood is flowing. Having a book on top of my head made me feel like I'm actually a human – not about to vaporize through my head at any given moment. That was a nice feeling.

01.08.2020

Fat.

-

My clothes fell off for this one. Whereas during many exercises I have felt bigger than usual, this one made me feel smaller. Made me feel empathy, too. That one's a constant. And the dancing part, again, made me move in a new way. Very loose. Like all of me could move in whatever direction possible. There was a tribal vibe. Also, a lot of shaking. Natural. Childlike. Careless.

02.08.2020

Internal space.

-

Still not over my feet – moving them individually is uncomfortable. The shaking felt good. Like electric current going through my body. At one point I noticed that I kind of lost myself, there was only the movement and a body. I let the electricity travel through my head into the surroundings. Afterwards I felt a bit chilly and watery, very comfortable. A bit like a mermaid. Filled with pure, crystal clear, natural water. Maybe a bit fizzy.

052

03.08.2020

When I look back, I really see some changes going on. I'm much more comfortable with my body and realize it better. I'm not cringing when I think about all the complex systems we humans have going on inside us. Avoiding my body was not the resolution – I had to go all in and really face everything. A very good journey. Today, we have skin.

-

How nice this was! I don't really stroke myself, but I should! I felt warmth and, surprise surprise, empathy. How many things these hands can do. I'm grateful. I really like to touch different things in nature. I always hug dying trees. Last weekend I played with water on a pier. I felt like a kid again. Moss feels good. Grass. Artificial things aren't that nice. With people and animals, I'm cautious, even though I really love animals. It's just that I can't tell whether they want to be alone.

05.08.2020

I've been working on softening my external space barriers, and it's been paying off. It feels good to let people in and take care of you. I think it makes one want to genuinely take care of others, too. Connections.

-

Most of the day I spent at home. I live in a studio apartment with a separate kitchen, so there's that. I swing between my bathroom, desk, window, bed and kitchen quite a lot. I can't sit still for long periods of time at home. Often, I lay on the floor, too – not today, though. In the afternoon I walked about half an hour to my parent's place, straight to the kitchen, ate, and then hopped in the car with my mom. We drove to Espoo for a swim. About a half hours drive, then some ten-minute walk through a forest, then a little bit of swimming. And same thing back. We stopped by Ikea on the way back home, so a lot of steps in between knickknacks for home. She then drove me back home, and my waltz between the places already mentioned continued. I guess I usually move around a lot. I like to move, even if I don't have anything specific to achieve. Especially car/bus/tram/train rides. Those take me places, also mentally.

053

06 . 08 . 2020

Nonreactivity.

◦

My mind emptied during this exercise. I'm sitting here thinking about what to write, but nothing comes to mind. This must be because this marks as the last exercise of the 32-day "program". A moment in between. I have arrived, I am at home.

07 . 08 . 2020

Woah. So that's it. Definitely some changes have occurred. I actually got a comment from a friend that I seem more present. And I feel more present. I will keep doing this grounding work, in a more relaxed manner. It also seems that my writing got more flowy towards the end, too. It's actually amazing how quickly things started to change, e.g. my reaction to focusing on details of my body. Now I find these small things more or less fascinating instead of distressing.

3.4.1 What the wind told me (2020)

Alongside my process diary for somatic exercises, I filmed material. I had the luxury of spending time in Lapland, which further enhanced my already growing sense of being grounded to the earthly experience. The pace was slower than before, and less about finding phenomenal visuals. Small movements and almost childlike wonder were enough to be worthy of recording.

Compared to my previous works, *What the wind told me* (WTWTM) has less elements in it, less effects and a calmer tone to it. It circles back to *Kansai beauty*, when I was not familiar with video editing, making the video more tranquil in a sense. With WTWTM, it was as if I was unlearning a large part of what I had learned about editing, at least so that I felt like I did not need to use everything I knew of. Yet at this point it is evident to me, that I still felt the need to tell a cohesive story, even though the material I filmed in Lapland (see fig. 8) came from the moment, without a story in mind. The bits with the “crystal ball” (see fig. 9) were filmed afterwards, as an intuitive addition, but as a means to bind the video clips together. This time, I am not wearing a mask anymore, but it is still the same character as in *Phase 1*. Now they are just free of their main restrictions, which is what the somatic practices made me feel like – shifting my focus from thoughts to sensing and feeling.



Fig. 8 Stills from WTWTM, filmed in Lapland

In a way, the timeline in which my three works *Phase 1*, WTWTM and *Phase 2* are situated in is a peculiar one. My initial goal with this thesis was to create a sequel to *Phase 1*, where the character would lose their mask and show what it feels like to experience the surroundings with their heightened senses. But WTWTM emerged in the middle, as a direct visual representation of the consequences of the somatic exercises, and it was only after a while that I realised it is an important part of this thesis.

In the process diary, I wrote how returning back to the city made me feel disoriented. In the filmed material it manifests so that in those that were recorded in Lapland, there is a sense of peace and natural flow, whereas the material filmed back in the city is more curated and rigid. In Lapland, I recorded performance-based material, which were reactions both to the connectedness I felt as well as my physical surroundings. Although I still stand by my decision of adding the scenes with the “crystal ball”, I would probably edit the beginning and the ending of the film, making it less linear. It is evident for me, how by adding these scenes, although being an intuitive idea in itself, it was an attempt to tell the story in a more literal sense. This way WTWTM lost some of its magic that was present in the material filmed before coming back to the city. However, this duality of the material is an excellent example of embodiment, and how my situated knowledge and existence reflects on the visuals of my choosing. If I lived in the countryside, my material and artistic identity would probably be very different from now, when I live in the city.



Fig. 9 Still with the “crystal ball”



Fig. 10 Performance based material that I did not end up using

Four key elements to good soma design

The first key element to good soma design, as defined by Höök (2018), is lived experience. Prior to being able to utilize the lived experience for the design practice, the designer has to train their aesthetic sensitivity. This way, the ability to notice subtle differences in bodily responses to various relational experiences becomes heightened. (Höök, 2018, p. 18) In my process diary, on 16th of July, I wrote about talking to the wind, which gave the name to *WTWTM*. It was when my senses and bodily responses were starting to become significantly heightened. Whenever I spent time in the nature, my movement resembled plants swaying in the wind. This translated in the performance-based recordings (see fig. 10), as I did not plan them besides of choosing the location. To keep the film from overflowing with elements, I decided to retain only a few of the performances.

The second key element is the slowing down of the design. It is about learning to articulate the nuances of bodily experiences, that the lived experience brings forth. (Höök, 2018, p. 19) This takes time, because our internal experiences are not without fail evident to us. The process requires self-reflection and willingness to engage oneself in the experiencing. (Höök 2018, p. 20) With *WTWTM*, I wanted to articulate the feelings of connectedness I had to my surroundings. At first, Rytz's (2009) exercises were somewhat difficult as I had not engaged myself to such somatic practices before. As my process diary implies, giving attention to delicate bodily experiences felt uncomfortable, but surprisingly soon it became an interesting journey. The shift in my thinking resulted in me being more easily connected to the moment, and thus, to my environment. I started to identify myself as a part of the nature, mimicking movements that plants and trees made. I spent greatly time in the nature, breathing with the wind, taking my time to notice the small things happening around me. This was the sense of peace I wanted to translate to my work, and through slowing down my filming and observation, I think I managed pretty well.

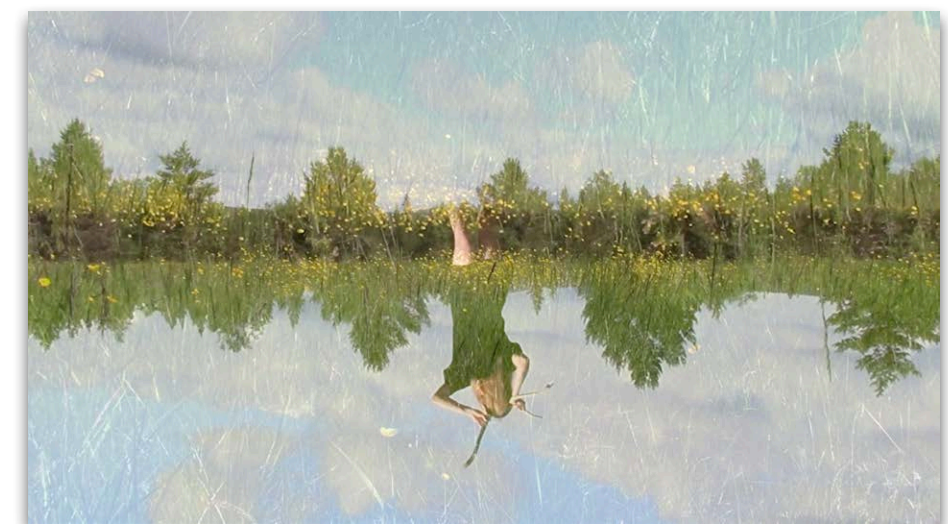


Fig. 11 Performance based stills from *WTWTM*

The third key element is testing and retesting against the desired aesthetic: coming back to the design to feel the interaction repeatedly (Höök, 2018, p. 20). How I reflect this to visual design, as it is directed more to the interaction design field, is viewing your design repeatedly and observing how it makes one feel. Pallasmaa (2009) states, that the body signals when a work of art is done by feelings of relaxation and balance (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 124). It is frequently that I feel a certain level of anxiety and resistance in me when something is not done, even though I have all the materials I need. Especially with *Phase 1* and *WTWTM*, this resistance was linked to the abundance of material, which needed to be pruned. For me, it is a difficult decision to make, when I have already committed to the materials and formed a level of connection to them. “Kill your darlings” is a term that describes this kind of action: removing one’s beloved elements to simplify the work (Glass, 2020, para. 2). In the case of *WTWTM*, as I mentioned earlier, I now would have simplified it even more.

The final key element is sociodigital materials. It speaks about the digital properties of the design and its interaction between the user, giving it a social aspect. (Höök, 2018, p. 21) Because Höök’s (2018) viewpoint is from interaction design and its tangible nature, I am yet again to translate this to the visual design world. In my view, the user – or in this thesis’ case the viewer – can “feel” visual design, as well. This is supported by the fact that our brain processes visual stimuli in both our amygdala and hippocampus, which are in control of emotions (Ledoux, 2015, as cited in Höök, 2018, p. 40). Apart from the material emerging from the tangible world, *WTWTM* is a digital work. With *WTWTM*, in addition to translating the sense of tranquillity I felt, I wanted to add a hint of magic, which was present in the communications with the nature. This is why I decided to add the scenes with layered videos (see fig. 11), as well as the fortune teller with the “crystal ball” (see fig. 9). Audiovisual work, for me, is a great way to further enhance the feelings I want to evoke, as visuals combined with fitting audio can make the work really “alive”. This is where I find myself agreeing with Pallasmaa’s (2016) description about the relationship between vision and hearing: while vision separates us from our surroundings by having a direction, sound is all around us (Pallasmaa, 2016, p. 39). In a way, sound broaden visuals. The soundscape for *WTWTM* consists purely of my mouth sounds.

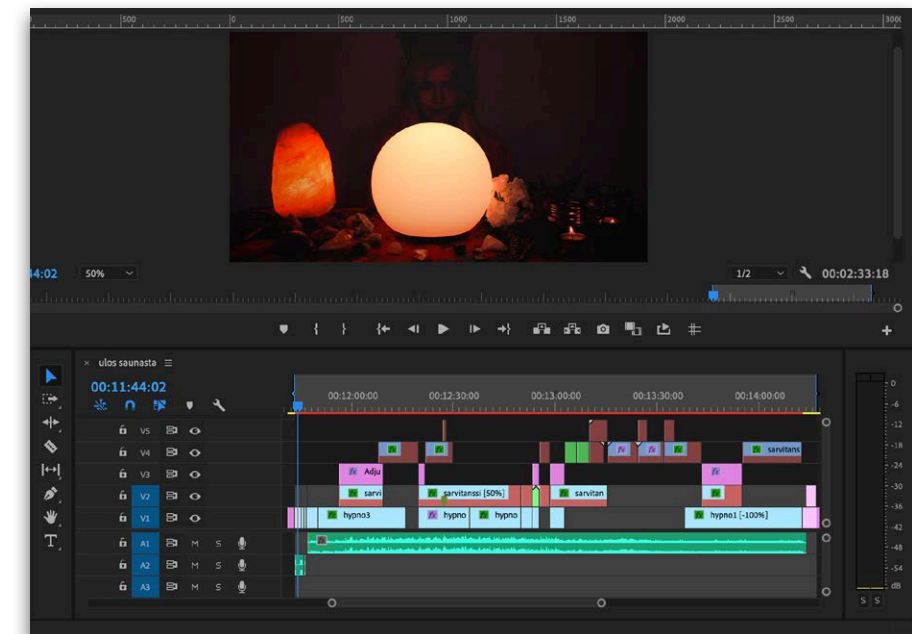


Fig. 12 *WTWTM* in edit on Adobe Premiere Pro™

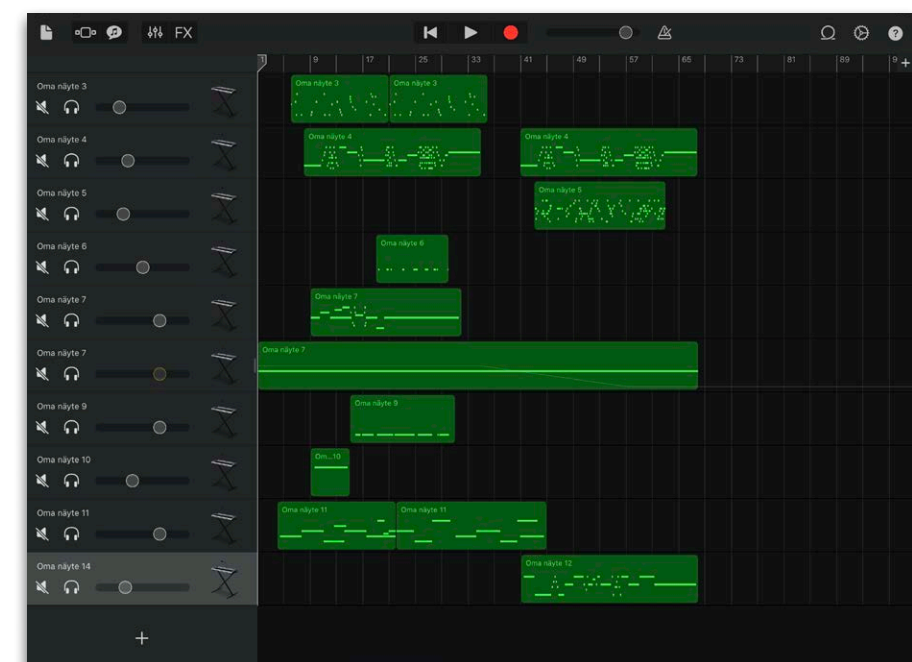


Fig. 13 Soundscape for *WTWTM* in GarageBand™

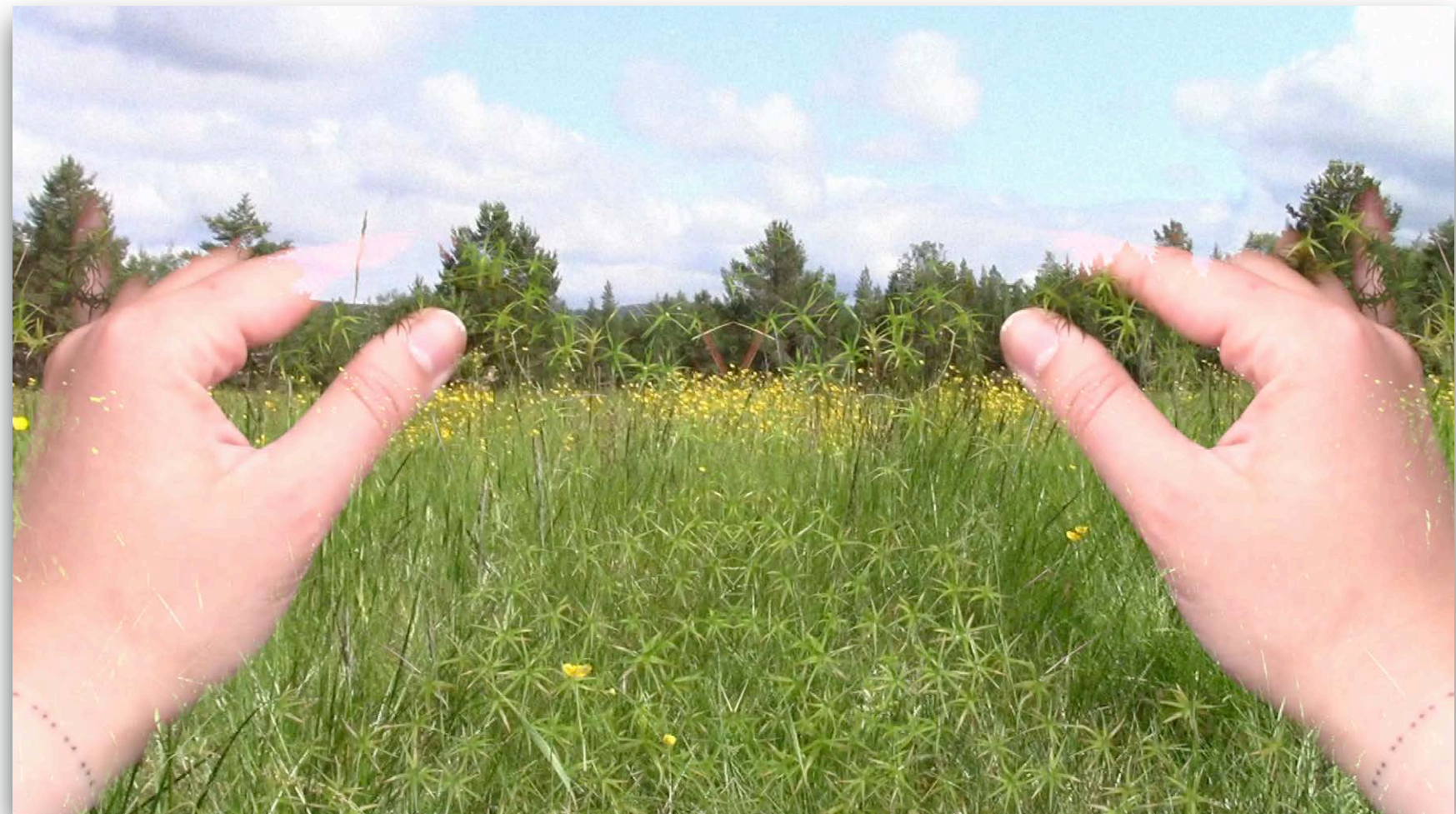


Fig. 14 Still from *WTWTM*

Final output

What the wind told me can be found at: <https://oonarayhantausta.com/what-the-wind-told-me>

3.4.2 Phase 2 (2021)

Pallasmaa mentions in his book *Ihon silmät - arkkitehtuuri ja aistit* (2016), that in the last decades, our perception of reality has been disintegrated, which has led to a crisis in representation. This has affected the arts world as well, causing a certain degree of hysteria regarding representation. (Pallasmaa, 2016, p. 20) In my works, I can certainly recognize this in the way I feel my narratives have to be as intelligible as possible, having a fairly structured, linear storyline. However, there is a growing resistance within me, and I feel like it is directly proportional to the increasing trust I have to the human mind to be able to resonate without having to “spell things out”. I am fairly confident, that this has to do with grounding myself in my body and thus integrating the bodily way of design thinking, as well as understanding my situational viewpoint and cultivating empathy.

In *Phase 2*, the character sits on a shore. It is a pivotal moment, a liminal space between the old and the new. The rigidity of *Phase 1* is over, and we have experienced a swift moment of magic with *WTWTM*. To describe this non-linearity, I edited together flashes of life without the mask (see fig. 15), soft touches with nature (see fig. 16) and climbing up the hill as to represent the difficult journey that leads to this moment (see fig. 17). In the water, the character sees a reflection of themselves, a version that they so desperately have been searching for (see fig. 18). The moment of unveiling what is behind the mask is very close. We can see the character finally being able to take the action that would bring the ideal to reality – so they reach for the water and wash the mask off (see fig. 19).



Fig. 15 Life without the mask



Fig. 16 Soft touches with nature



Fig. 17 Still with the character climbing up the hill



Fig. 18 Reflection in the water



Fig. 19 Washing off the mask

The design process with *Phase 2* was different from *WTWTM*. Whereas *WTWTM* was a reflection of the immediate effects of Rytz's (2009) bodily exercises, without an existing plan of the plot, *Phase 2* was more curated from the beginning. For this reason, I did not film any excess performance-based material, hence I used everything I had. An interesting notion is that nearly all the material is from outside of the city. Whenever I had the chance to visit countryside, I took my camcorder with me and looked for scenic backgrounds for my performances. I had thought beforehand that I wanted a scene with the character washing off the mask, and in contrast to that, scenes where the character would be moving in nature as to show how life would feel without the boundaries that the mask bring. The scene with the character climbing up the hill is to represent the final, exhausting climb to see and feel clearly.



Fig. 20 Still from the shore

The significant difference between *Phase 2* and *WTWTM* could be also viewed so, that with *WTWTM* I had more of an embodied sketching approach. I let the movements emerge from the moment, whereas with *Phase 2* I knew which actions to take. However, with performance-based material, it is important for me to film as few retakes as possible, as with every retake, the performance loses its spontaneity and becomes acting. The element of sketching that comes from the spontaneity is what makes the work more personal (see chapter 2.3). I had to retake the scene with the character on the shore (see fig. 20) a few times, which made me frustrated. The frustration affects my ability to perform, as it manifests bodily so that

my movements grow more rigid and controlled. However, it is impossible to always control whether the camera is located right, in focus or especially whether there are interruptions from outside. This is a skill I aim to develop, to be able to calmly retake and keep a playful attitude while doing so.

Compared to *WTWTM*, which was more of a spontaneous audiovisual outcome, for *Phase 2* I was slowstorming quite a bit. Apart from the scenes with the character, everything else took time to form and find the right places. To truly depict the oscillation between highs and lows, and tranquillity and obstacles in a soft manner, I had to tune in and listen carefully to the delicate messages my body was giving me.

The editing process of *Phase 2* was colourful. In addition to the curated performance-based material, I had filmed nature, mostly from my walks around my neighbourhood. I started experimenting with layers, which I have grown very fond of. I thought that because I like layers, I should add them as much as possible. However, after a while I realised that *Phase 2* was not about playing as much as it was about telling a story. I had to “kill my darlings” once again, but the decision made *Phase 2* much more cohesive. I made sure the colour scheme was consistent as well, which is not usually a high priority for me.

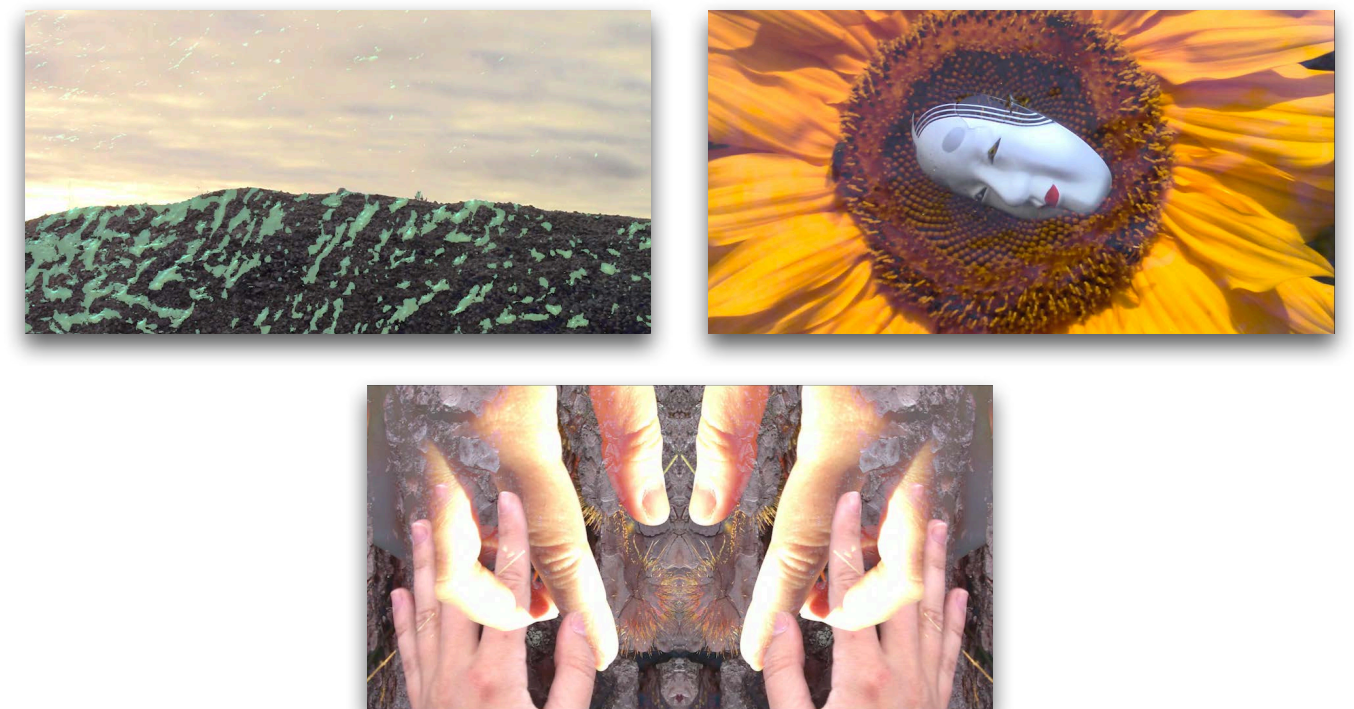


Fig. 21 Layered stills that were deleted

It came as no surprise, that while editing *Phase 2*, I once again became stuck with the material at hand. Even though I had breaks in between, no matter how I rearranged the video clips, it did not seem to work as I wanted. However, performing grounding exercises from Rytz's *Centered and Connected: A Therapeutic Approach to Mind-Body Awareness* (2009), allowed my mind to have a rest, resulting in an idea that tied *Phase 2* to *WTWTM*. I already knew about the connection between *Phase 1*, *WTWTM* and *Phase 2*, but I did not think of using some of the material filmed in Lapland for *Phase 2*. The most important scene to describe the connectedness I felt in Lapland was of the meadow (see fig. 22), and that would be a proper link to *Phase 2*, to describe the relieved feeling. This is where my existential knowledge took part, returning to the bodily sensations of comfort for which I luckily had visual material.

Experimenting within artistic research creates directions and end results that were not included in the plan. Especially when one's progress becomes slower, experiments provide change and new meanings. As it is with reality, artistic research is similarly a living process where anything can occur. (Varto, 2018, p. 132) Most of the time, while editing both *WTWTM* and *Phase 2*, the process was about experimenting. While editing *Phase 2*, I started experimenting with 3D modeling software Blender. It is interesting to me, that while my artistic research is largely about situating myself in the analog, tangible world, my interest towards different digital platforms grew simultaneously. I learned how to create and animate text in Blender and wanted to add this knowledge into *Phase 2*. The 3D modeled title sequence (see fig. 23) further enhances the very name and storyline of the work, stepping into new realms of living and experimenting. Referring back to Pallasmaa's (2009) notion about the external tool determining the designer's actions, I found a new way of utilizing my computer for my design work, thus expanding the possibilities. The soundscape is a combination of field recordings and composed music.



Fig. 22 Still of the meadow



Fig. 23 Title sequence

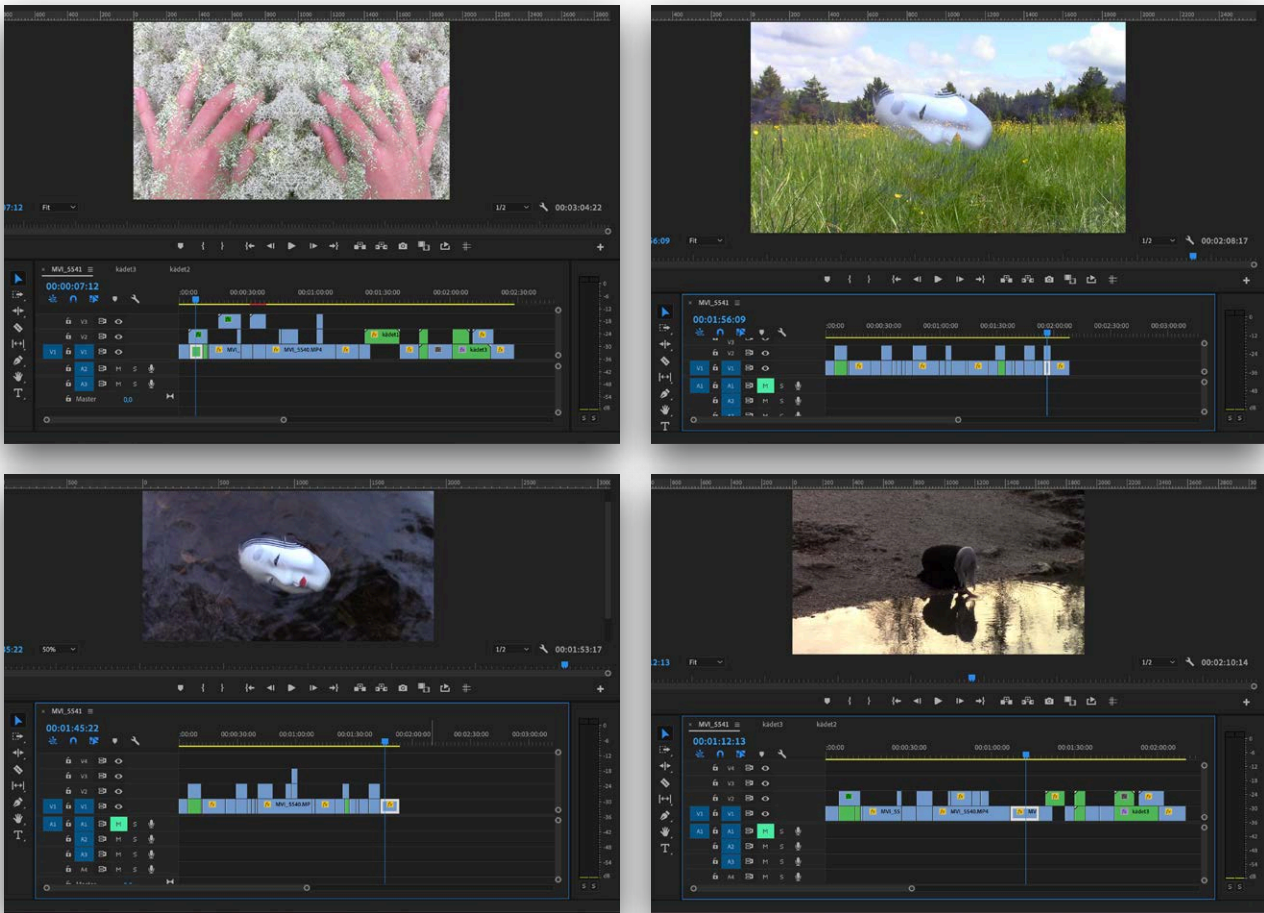


Fig. 24 *Phase 2* in edit on Adobe Premiere Pro™

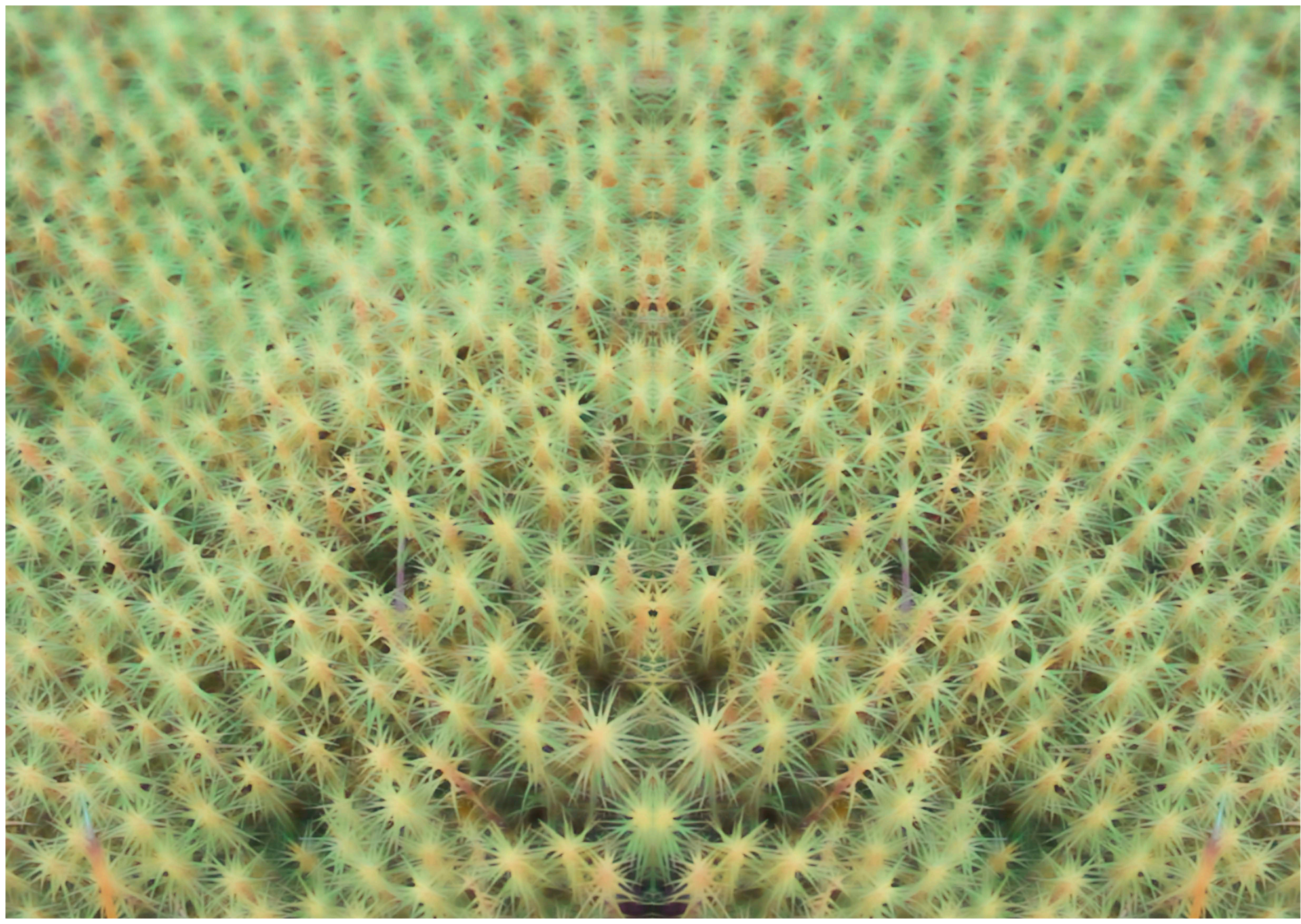


Fig. 25 Still from *Phase 2*

~~~~~ Final output

*Phase 2* can be found at: <https://oonarayhantausta.com/phase-2>









## 4 REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I reflect on the process and discuss the learnings.

#### 4 Reflections and conclusions

Anything we experience, sense and feel can be used as artistic material (Varto, 2018, p. 34). In a way, *Phase 1*, *WTWTM* and *Phase 2* form a collection of visual diary entries and self-exploration through visual elements. Each work reflects the circumstances and feelings, as well as overall themes that were present during the production.

*Phase 1* starts a storyline, where I discover a new area of life whilst battling with overwhelming, existential thoughts and chaotic surrounding realities. The new area in question is bodily existence, more specifically performance art. It is the first glance to a new direction, giving contrast and thus magnifying the tense, sheltered and disconnected state of being. The mask is to represent this state. Furthermore, I had filmed several different scenarios with the masked character (see fig. 26), but to show the feeling of being trapped in a certain mindset, I chose to use only one. As it sometimes is with life, happy ending is not a given and *Phase 1* ends with a question mark.



Fig. 26 Scenarios with the masked character intended for *Phase 1*

I have found use to the scenarios that did not end up in *Phase 1*. Sometimes, when I am inspired, I use the material to produce short videos for my Instagram™ account. In a way, I am creating a world wherein this character is reappearing in different situations. For this reason, I am hesitant to let them go after this thesis.

After the clash of the old and the new, there was a time of hibernation and reflection. During that time, I wondered what made the performance art course so powerful that it seemed to shift my whole artistic identity. This is what I wanted to explore further, and thus chose it as a theme for my thesis. I familiarized myself with Rytz's (2009) exercises, while spending time in the most magical place I know of – Lapland. Without the noisy nature of city life, I could fully immerse myself in the connected state of being, resulting in *WTWTM*. In *WTWTM*, I am not wearing anything that was present in *Phase 1*. The mask is gone, as well as the wig and the jumpsuit. This is because I did not think of filming performance-based material that would relate to this thesis, hence leaving my properties at home. Referring back to Varto's (2018) notion of experiments providing new meanings, this is exactly what happened when I started to compile the materials together. I realised, that the performance-based material filmed in Lapland would actually be a fitting continuation to *Phase 1*, giving a glimpse of a possible new reality: one without any restrictions.

Following the magical period of synchronicity with nature, I came back to the city and life went back to normal. Another reflection period occurred, along with the busy daily life. The thought of *Phase 2* was present constantly, forming in my subconscious and conscious mind. I kept carrying out the exercises by Rytz (2009), albeit in a more irregular and infrequent manner. Centering oneself became notably harder, as nothing seemed to be certain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I did not forget to stop and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of life from time to time, which helped me to connect with my thesis. I took long walks in nature, attended the few art exhibitions and performances I could and started a regular dance class. At this point I had accepted that the journey to better understanding the somatic way of being would be a long and oscillating one, sometimes it being easier and sometimes harder to be present in the moment. However, the disconnected state of being had already started to disintegrate, so the story which I had in mind for *Phase 2* remained the same. *Phase 2* is likewise a reflection of the circumstances and feelings that were present during the production. Sometimes I remembered vividly the magical connections of Lapland (see fig. 22), and sometimes it felt like climbing uphill (see fig. 17). Nevertheless, I feel like the mask is now washed off (see fig. 27), and it is easier to be centered and focused, both artistically and holistically speaking.





Fig. 27 Still from *Phase 2*

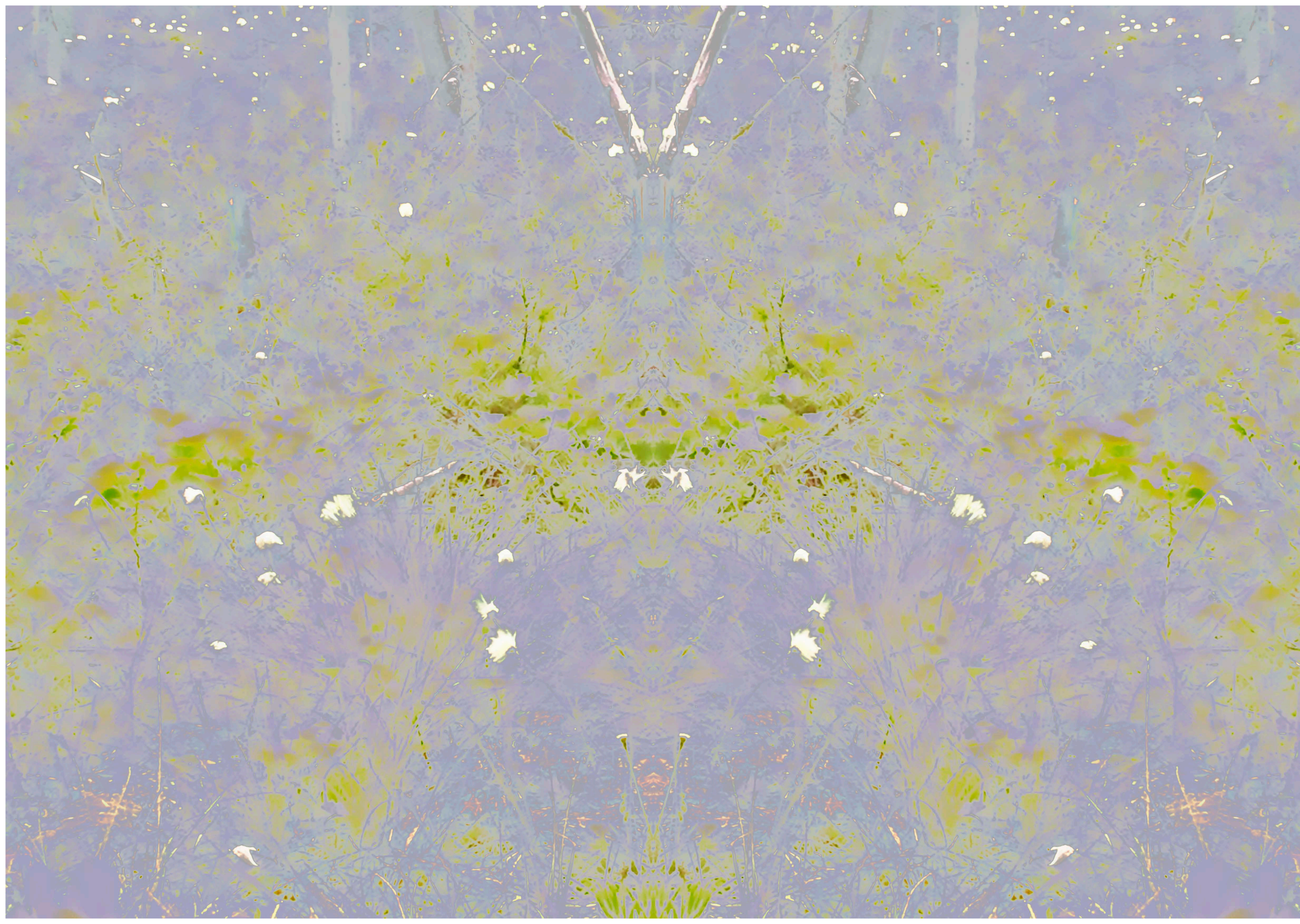
My initial goal with this thesis was to examine how connecting to my body affects my visual thinking and design. Within the limitations of these peculiar COVID-19 pandemic times, I feel that this goal was fairly well met. I had hopes to participate in different workshops, exhibitions and performances, but due to the pandemic, most were cancelled. Albeit being an introspective subject to begin with, the research turned out to be even more so. For me, it answered the question “how”: I became more delicate with my visual choices, as well as intuitive and trusting. I also found a new way of thinking with the external tool, computer, that I use – 3D modeling. I shifted my focus from literal understandability to more of a flowing, movement-based storytelling. In addition to the changes in my artistic identity, the subject of my thesis was holistic in all other areas of life as well. I became more in tune with my emotions and sensations, and more sensitive to aesthetic experiences. My appreciation of even the mundane grew, and I started to notice beauty in many things I did not notice before. I now have tools to center myself if I start feeling disjointed. Empathy is perhaps the core thing that increased in me – both towards myself and others. The greatest discovery concerning empathy was understanding that recognizing and accepting the differences between people cultivates empathy as well. I understood more deeply how one’s knowledge is indeed situational. All of this affects my artistic identity, as it is an inseparable part of me. The need to articulate something particular with my art as cohesive as possible is not as important to me now, as I understand that not everyone will perceive my messages the way I intend to express them no matter how I build my works.

I was also introduced to profound philosophies. Many of my source materials referenced the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty juxtaposes our bodily existence in relation to the world to the way our hearts maintain our bodies: in a constant interaction, giving life (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 235). This is something that I found to be accurate, in a quite spiritual level. The more stressed I was, the less I could do with my research, whereas when I felt calm, the process was flowing more easily. To cultivate this sense of calmness, bodily exercises helped.

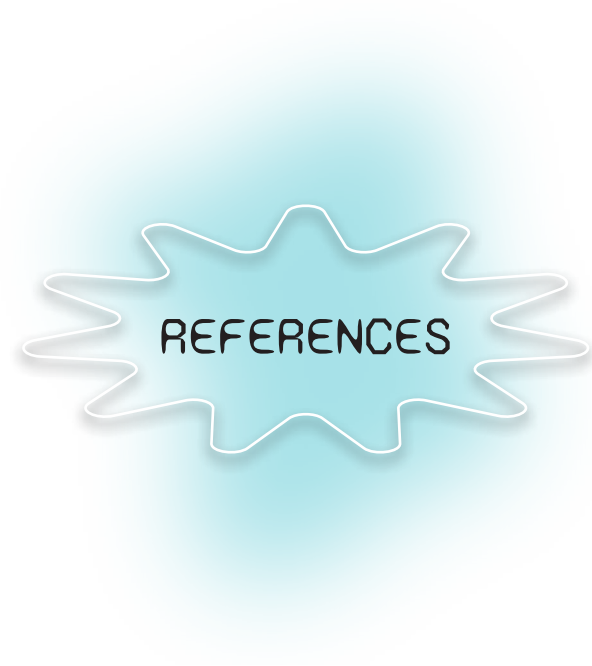
What this thesis did not answer that well, was the question “why”, as in why does connecting to my body affect my visual thinking. This could be the next subject to study in detail. I could have tapped into performance art as well, to further study bodily narratives. I also had insecurities about the knowledge I gained, more specifically its validity. Artistic research is highly subjective, so the conclusions I made are personal and cannot be presented as definite truths. The theory about designing with the body within the field of visual communication design was scarce, so I had to draw connections from other fields. However, this was at the same time inspiring and motivating.

To conclude, I am extremely grateful that I had the chance to examine this subject in such depth and I certainly view this as a beginning of a lifelong journey of self-exploration and what it means to be a sensing organism with the ability to create. I am hoping that this will create a momentum that will create large part of my future career and life mission. I truly feel that this is the beginning of something bigger.









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